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Chapter One

[image]

"GET OUT OF HERE DAMN CAT!"

Spencer jumped, immediately panicking. He hastily clambered out of the trash can and made a ruckus. The calico ran off, a piece of meat clamped tightly in his jaws. He continued sprinting away, the piece of meat flailing limply around as he jumped over a wall and into the safety of the forest. Spencer sat down, his chest rising and falling rapidly.
He dropped his pathetic excuse for a meal, prepared to eat. The young toms ribs were visible and he was in poor condition. He bit at the piece of meat before gagging. He sighed, burying it. Spencer decided he wasn't hungry after all. He shook his dirty coat and began to pad away from the buried piece of meat.
"*All that for nothing..."* He thought bitterly.

Spencer decided he'd go visit his mother. He began his trek towards the human village and towards the nest of his kin.

He was his mother's first-born kitten and he was sold to a family when he was only a few months old. He'd been loved dearly, until his owner had screamed at the oldest man in the household. She'd been struck, soon after that, she left. Eventually the man had shouted at Spencer to get out, which he was used to now, but back then it was shocking. Spencer had left and never returned.

"Tanya! Tanya are you home?" The calico shouted, hopping onto the fence and into her garden.
"Oh Spencer!"
The two cats quickly padded towards each other, exchanging comforting licks to one another's ear.

"Hello mom, glad to see you're faring well, hm?" Spencer remarked,

smiling and sitting next to his mother.
"Oh yes! But *you* Spencer... Well, I'm not sure how to put it I guess well... I'm worried about you. You're so skinny... Have you eaten at all lately? You look like you're on the verge of starvation! You're still a kitten Spencer... you can't be living like this!" Tanya blurted out. She noticed a few scars along his unusually muscular shoulders and a tear on his left ear. "I'm glad you visited Spencer... but if I may ask, have you been fighting with other cats recently?" She asked, her tail flicking nervously.

Spencer gingerly nodded, his ears lowering in guilt. Tanya didn't respond, she just frowned and thought for a minute. They both sat in silence, lost in their thoughts.
"Spencer..."
"Yes mom?"
"I think you should move in with me..."
Spencer's ears twitched in annoyance. As much as he loved his mother, he'd *never* move in with her. He couldn't be seen by his past enemies; eating out of a bowl with a collar and bell tied tightly across the shiny clean scruff of his neck. Doing tricks for his humans and being stroked gently... "*like a pet"* He thought, grimacing.
Tanya noticed his obvious annoyance and added quickly, "Of course you don't have to! But... it'd be better for your health and I *would* enjoy the company", she purred affectionately.
Spencer shook his head, guilt-ridden. His mothers eyes filled with sadness.

"You know I can't do that Tanya. Not again". Spencer replied, ashamedly giving his mom's coat a quick lick. She nodded, silently understanding. She smiled at him sadly, but genuinely.
"Well... I must be off, goodbye" Spencer spoke, standing up. Tanya glanced at him, still envisioning the tiny kitten he used to be... Play wrestling with his littermates and happily suckling her milk before plopping down to nap.
He's changed.
Of course he was still a kitten, but it seemed as if he was some sort of an adult now. It brought tears to her baby-blue eyes as she nodded and pressed her head to his flank.
"Take care Spencer." She murmured to him, staying pressed against him until Spencer stepped away and jumped back over the wall

without muttering another word.
A tear fell from Tanya's eye, and then another.
He was gone. He'd never be the same happy kitten that she remembered him to be.

Chapter Two

Spencer left. humiliating tears staining his dark blue eyes. He tried to blink them away but they wouldn't leave, one fell down, dripping off the tip of his muzzle.

"Oh, are we *crying* now?"

Spencer whipped around, all traces of tears gone and replaced with a hiss. A grey tabby-tom sat atop the roof of a house. He looked tattered and flat-out disgusting. Tears and scars covered his flank and face.

"What's wrong? Want to go back and cry to your mommy?" The cat spat at Spencer belligerently. The calico unsheathed his claws and grimaced.

"What do you want you fleabag?" Spencer hissed back at the stray.

"You to die already." He responded, unsheathing his claws and lunging at Spencer. The young cat instinctively jumped out of the way, jumping onto the stray's back, biting his neck scruff. The cat screeched and backed into the fence making Spencer let go at the painful contact.

The tabby turned around, hissing and stepping back to make a bit of room.

Spencer jumped to the left of the stray, moving back quickly when the tabby retaliated by biting at the spot Spencer had just been in. The calico scratched at the stray's chest making it hiss and bite Spencer's torn ear aggressively. After biting the sensitive spot, the stray scratched at Spencer's haunches. The calico fell onto his back exposing his belly.

"*This is it kid.*" The stray spat ready to violently claw at Spencer's belly. The younger cat flinched, shutting his eyes and ready for the impact. His eyes opened when he heard screeching and the stray was pushed off of him.

Spencer looked up to see a huge cat biting and ripping expertly at the stray. They both fought for a while until the tabby realized he

was no match for the giant cat and retreated. The giant cat then turned to Spencer.

Spencer jumped up, huffing and backing up to the fence, ready for a fight with this... this monster of a cat!

"*I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead*-" He thought, shutting his eyes tightly

"You alright kid?" The cat asked, carefully padding up next to him. Spencer opened his eyes, frozen in absolute terror. The huge cat seemed to notice this.
"No need to be afraid, I'm Emberstripe I come from within the forest. Good thing I showed up right now huh?" He asked, smiling.
It took all of Spencer's courage to look Emberstripe in the eyes and nod. Emberstripe seemed impressed by his bravery.
"You fought well young one, tell me your name". Emberstripe said, relaxing his shoulders and tilting his head in curiosity.
Spencer took a deep breath, doing his best not to stutter.
"Spencer, s-sir."
"Dammit"
Emberstripe didn't seem to notice though, he just nodded, thinking for a moment.

"I have a proposal for you young one". He spoke solemnly.

Spencer decided to man up and throw some rude comments around.
"Well then *sir* what's your supposed '*proposal* ' huh"? Spencer asked.
Emberstripe frowned at the sudden wisecrack from the calico. He seemed to shrug it off though.

"Do you know of the four Clans that reside within this forest?" He asked, staring at Spencer. The younger cat nodded hesitantly.
"I've heard the stories of dangerous wildcats in this forest, I've never believed them, but is that what you're going on about?" Spencer asked, rolling his eyes.
Emberstripe snapped, sick of the cats snarky replies.
"Watch that tongue kid, I might cut it off you know". He hissed, shoulders tightening and his claws sheathing and unsheathing repeatedly.

Spencer grew a new respect for Emberstripe as the huge cat relaxed himself, anger still apparent in his eyes though.
"Yes. The 'Wild Cats', we live in the forest and live only off of the land, not that disgusting crow-food you buried earlier.
"*So he saw that?*" Spencer began to wonder *just* how much this suspicious cat knew about him.
"If your wondering, yes, I have been watching you recently". Emberstripe said, seeming to read Spencer's mind.

"Well then... Okay. I accept your offer". The calico responded shrugging.
Emberstripe nodded, carefully inspecting Spencer.
"But I have two questions. First question, why are you so big?"
"I'm a Maine Coon, it's not my fault I'm this size."
"*Oh sorry.* Uh, second question, how do I know this isn't an ambush?"
This question seemed to catch Emberstripe's attention. He seemed pleasantly surprised that Spencer would ask a question like that.
"You'll just have to trust me." Emberstripe replied.

Spencer shook his head in disapproval. "*No cat is to be trusted in this world*" He replied angrily. "I'm not doing this." He said, padding away.
"Wait!"
"What do you *want from me?!* God!" Spencer spat in rage.
"... If you change your mind, meet me here next sunup".
Emberstripe meowed, ears twitching in annoyance.
"Whatever you say." Spencer said, leaving without a second thought.

Chapter Three

Spencer climbed back over the wall and into an alleyway of the human town. He jumped down onto the cold cement and shivered. He immediately missed the feeling of the soft warm soil beneath his paws. He shook away those thoughts and jumped onto a cardboard box. Spencer curled up into a pathetic ball and tried to sleep. The box was damp and he imagined being curled up under a nice shady oak instead of a cold wet box. He envisioned eating the food he caught by himself instead of stealing it from the garbage.

He wished he wasn't starving.
He wished he was content.
He wished he was safe.
He wished he was happy...
He wished he had taken Emberstripe's offer and joined the Clans.
Wait, he wished he had taken Emberstripe's offer and joined the Clans?

Spencer woke up, stretching out his limbs. He was cold, and now wet from the box he laid on.
And most of all, he was hungry.
Spencer hopped off the box, causing it to collapse. He sighed and climbed onto the wall between him and the forest. He jumped down, landing on all fours. He took a deep breath and then the calico tentatively sniffed the air, trying to scope out the meat he'd stolen yesterday.
Then the scent hit him.
Emberstripe!
Spencer realized this was his only chance to act on Emberstripes offer and go be a wildcat. He jumped onto his feet, racing towards the place he'd met the Maine Coon last evening, hoping he'd still be there, waiting.
"Emberstripe?!" He shouted once he entered the clearing.
"I didn't think you'd come kid."